

REPORT  
OF  
4-H HOME IMPROVEMENT CONFERENCE

EXTENSION CONFERENCE ROOM  
U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
WASHINGTON, D. C.  
September 27, 1949

EXTENSION SERVICE PERSONNEL AND OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Kenneth Anderson, Associate Director, National Committee on Boys' and Girls' Club Work  
Enrique Bello, Director of 5-C Club Work in Cuba  
Dorothy Emerson, State 4-H Club Leader, Maryland  
Pauline Gordon, State Home Management Specialist, North Carolina  
Florence Howard, State 4-H Club Leader, West Virginia  
Hallie Hughes, State 4-H Club Leader, Virginia  
Ruth Jamison, State Home Furnishings Specialist, Virginia  
Alice Linn, Extension Clothing Specialist, USDA  
Florence Mason, State House Furnishing Specialist, Maryland  
R. V. Mullen, Sears-Roebuck Foundation, Chicago, Illinois  
G. L. Noble, Director, National Committee on Boys' and Girls' 4-H Club Work  
Mary Ruth Rapp, Sarah Bradley Tyson Memorial Fellow of the Women's National Farm and Garden Association  
Hattie Mae Rhonemus, National 4-H Club Fellow  
Mary Rokahr, Director In Charge, Home Economics Specialists Section  
Dana Schrupp, National 4-H Club Fellow  
Ray A. Turner, Senior Agriculturist - 4-H Club Work, USDA  
Gertrude L. Warren, Organization of 4-H Club Work, USDA

This conference on 4-H Home Improvement Work was called by Miss Warren at the request of Mr. Kenneth Anderson to discuss the program for which awards are being given by the Sears-Roebuck Foundation.

The meeting was called to order by Miss Warren, who asked Mr. Noble to give some background information. Mr. Noble stated that the Home Improvement Program primarily for 4-H Club girls was not one of the first phases for which the National Committee on Boys' and Girls' Club work furnished incentives. In the past, Sears-Roebuck Foundation has offered incentives for a variety of phases of 4-H project work. During the war it was gardening. Before the war, this organization offered an award for outstanding progress in a county based on the question "What had 4-H contributed to agriculture and community life in the county?", which resulted in the St. Louis County 4-H Club building in Minnesota. The present 4-H Club Home Improvement program was approved a few years ago but results have not been all that were hoped for. According to some statistical data, the number of members decreased after the incentives were offered. That is why the meeting was requested today. Miss Warren stated that there is a question about the decrease in enrollment in the 4-H home improvement clubs. She pointed out that completions had not decreased along with enrollment. In fact there was a slight increase.



Miss Rokahr was then called upon. She stated that she is glad that the Foundation and the National Committee have called attention to this program. Home Improvement Work is one of the finest basic programs for better living for today and in the future. However, there is a lack of clear cut purposes in this field as compared to foods and clothing. This project cuts across home management and other fields. This may be a strength and not a weakness but it is a difference. In this project the girls run across situations related to the home, adults, and family relationships. There are fewer house furnishing specialists in the States than foods and clothing specialists. However, Miss Rokahr noticed that the largest enrollments are in the Southern States where there are fewer home furnishing specialists.

Miss Gordon of North Carolina discussed the work that is being done there. Monthly demonstrations are given. At these meetings, rooms are set up and all-day work-shops for the girls are held. They have discarded classes at State 4-H Club Week. They always have both boys and girls give demonstrations - a window demonstration, a floor demonstration, and the like. Floor sanding demonstrations have been stressed this year because they found that the girls were trying to set up rooms where the floors were very bad. They feel that the boys' and girls' work should not be separated in this project. Both boys and girls are encouraged to give demonstrations at short courses. They can use the same equipment as that taken to the training meetings. Their beginning project is on the care of the room. As the girls grow older they do their own rooms and later move on into other rooms of the house.

Hallie Hughes from Virginia said that the various names of the project throw the enrollment reports into different categories from year to year. For example, the housekeeping project which was started during the war when materials were hard to buy, is frequently reported under home management. This would give a false impression that home furnishings in project enrollment was decreasing. This shifted emphasis from home improvement to housekeeping during the war has made a nice basis for buying now. In their housekeeping project they ask what during the war made housekeeping hard? What was wrong with the sheets and the other bedding? What qualities should the girls look for in future buying that would make housekeeping easier? Miss Jamison from Virginia said that each project was planned so that a girl would have something to do, something to buy or make, and some facts to learn. In room improvement demonstrations, they encouraged a girl to begin with a unit, such as a sleeping unit, a dressing unit, etc. Their outstanding girl this year was a fourth year member. Last year she had her own room. This year she has improved a guest room, her mother's room, and the pantry. She plans to improve the porch next. She feels that help on buying is what we need to stress now. Others agreed with her.

In Virginia last year, a total of 7,648 members were reached through the housekeeping project. These girls were approximately 10 to 14 years of age. There were 1,016 advanced members. The total was 8,664. This year 1,328 housekeeping members were enrolled and the advanced enrollment went up to 3,401. They make it a point to get a demonstration set up each year for each club as a method of teaching. They feel that the girls cannot be taught by mere talking.

In North Carolina it is a requirement that a member take the other members to her room to show what she has done in the project.



Miss Mason said that in Maryland they have just reorganized their project. They have set up a limit of \$25. for all furnishings with the exception of the bed, chest and chair, in the room. Maryland has started a series of kodachrome slides for teaching purposes. They feel that 4-H girls are handicapped in that they do not have a chance to see much in the way of good furnishings in their stores so they have decided that kodachrome slides will be the best answer. They are also preparing a series of bulletins for their 4-H home improvement projects.

Miss Mason gave an illustration which had helped her a great deal in interesting people in planning their houses, especially for family living. When the rehabilitation of the House of Parliament was being planned, the members said to Churchill, "Should we still make the house so that the members have to move to the next section in order to vote 'no'?" He replied, "You shape your house and then your house shapes you."

Mr. Noble raised the question, "Do you consider architecture when you teach buyman-ship?"

Miss Jamison brought out the fact that local retailers have too much plush living room furniture to offer and they insist that that is what the women want. On the other hand, the women tell her that such furniture is all they can get.

Miss Gordon said that mail order houses have a great influence. She mentioned their influence in lace curtains and 3-piece sets. She feels that they could do a better job in using their influence. She said that the Sears Roebuck kits on window arrangements are good.

Miss Emerson stated that the home furnishing program needs considerable guidance. Leaders are afraid to go ahead by themselves.

Mr. Noble asked, "Do you need a leader's manual?"

Miss Hughes said, "We have a big job to do. Farm people should not copy city homes! But it is difficult to train leaders along these lines. They see in a magazine a picture of a California city home and try to copy it. Miss Gordon said that one way to overcome this is by the use of slides. She always asks her people, "Do picture windows give you 'sights' or 'views'?"

Miss Mason brought out the problem of the turn-over in personnel and the fact that many of her home demonstration agents have had less than two hours of college work in home furnishings.

Miss Howard said that in West Virginia they center attention on the girl's own room. She feels that, although this program has lagged, they are now making some progress in improving it. The question was raised about opportunities for teaching in 4-H camps. Miss Howard thought it was difficult to teach such project work in camps and the others agreed with her.

Miss Gordon reemphasized that boys and girls and men and women should work together on home improvement and that this must not be considered just a girl's project. She makes it a point to have the farm agents put up the exhibits and work with the demonstrations she gives.



At this point Miss Rokahr said that some of the points that she had gained from this meeting are:

1. The project is a boys' and girls' project.
2. It is highly important to begin the project at an early age and keep building.
3. The national awards are set up for those with an outstanding record of achievement and not for beginners.
4. We need to take stock of the award program set up and see if it fits in with the objectives that have been discussed so far.

Miss Warren asked Mr. Anderson to give information on the awards program. The information provided by Mr. Anderson showing participation by States in 1948 and a summary of total participation is attached. Mr. Anderson said that our next step is to develop specific techniques for improving this program.

Mr. Mullen said that his company was interested in determining what the trouble was. They furnished money for awards and then saw a drop in enrollment figures. At this point, it was again pointed out that this was not the true situation.

Mr. Turner raised the point that it is difficult to judge work in home management and home improvement separately so far as national awards are concerned. A suggestion was made that a score card might help to narrow the subject matter. Miss Rapp said that she objected to breaking down the subject matter, "We are training girls and working with homes. Why break down the fine points of subject matter?" She stated that she had not thought of boys in this project before, although she had worked for many years in Indiana and Ohio. Miss Rhonemus has worked one year as a home agent in Ohio. She had only one member in this project in her county last year. She feels that some satisfactory methods of training need to be worked out to give women who have not had years of experience some confidence in their ability to help 4-H members in this project work.

Miss Warren brought us back to stating the objectives. Mr. Noble said, "Shall we keep the name?"

Mr. Mullen suggested we broaden the objectives as they stand now.

Mr. Anderson said that one trouble is that we do not know what the enrollment is in the home improvement project. Miss Rokahr said that management is a part of each project and should be encouraged.

Miss Warren pointed out the need for some clear statements to give to the States. It was voted unanimously to keep the name of "4-H Improvement Program." Miss Warren asked the people attending from the States to revise the objectives. Miss Gordon suggested a home agent be named to the committee, and Miss Mason suggested that a local leader be added. Mr. Turner cautioned that the objectives should not be too long.



It was decided to spend the remaining time discussing demonstration tours and various techniques. The three main problems:

1. Need for more adequate literature.
2. Need for more trained leadership. There are only 20 Home Improvement Specialists so that many States have a program without a specialist.
3. Need for a variety of techniques. This project cannot be presented by discussion alone. It must have visual aids. Two visual aids are (1) Slides, and (2) Actual illustrations. It must have the help also of specialists in related fields.

As to kits from commercial companies, Mr. Mullen stated that Sears-Roebuck have two which are good - one on bedmaking and one on window treatment.

Miss Gordon said that the Sears slip covering kit is not suitable for young girls and boys.

Miss Warren asked: "Can Sears work with us on kits?"

Mr. Mullen said, "Yes."

The question was raised, "How about film strips which could be used in many States?" There was considerable discussion on whether strips or the slides would be most useful. Mr. Anderson asked: "What subjects would you suggest?" Arrangement, care and use were suggested. A series on storage was another suggestion. Another idea was a series of slides on what one boy or girl did in their project. Such a series would give the philosophy and stimulate further participation in the project. Buying was a suggestion but it was felt that such slides would not apply to all States equally.

Miss Rapp said that the first job is to sell the Home Demonstration Agents. The average Home Demonstration Agent automatically carries on foods and clothing projects but does not feel much concern if the enrollment is low in 4-H Home Improvement work. One disadvantage is that there is no trip awarded in this project to the State Fair.

Counties do not have money for illustrations. In North Carolina the floor-sanding demonstrations were underwritten by a floor-sanding company.

Mr. Anderson said: "How about 2x2 slides telling a 4-H Club member's story of her home improvement project?" "Could this be given at the Congress?" "Should it be a contest developed by each State?"

Another idea advanced was concerned with awards for demonstrations. Should this be on a State and County basis too?

Other suggestions given were: 1) A series of stories on what had been done in the 4-H Home Improvement project; 2) An effort to point up this project to the readers in the Extension Service Review; 3) Possibilities of the 4-H Fellows preparing material for the project; 4) Selecting a State Specialist for several months to prepare whatever material was deemed necessary.



The following possibilities were summarized: 1) A demonstration contest to provide incentives. 2) Preparation of literature. Should this be a leader's manual? 3) Exchange of literature. 4) Visual aids: We need success stories and promotion aids. 5) Local cooperation by the stores to furnish teaching materials. 6) Attention called to the project in circular letters from the Federal Extension office. 7) Attention called to the project in the National 4-H Club News.

Miss Rokahr also suggested promotion of slides by the members to show their own 4-H Home Improvement project work. The question was raised, "Would the slides be good enough to actually show what the girl had done?"

Mr. Mullen suggested that the Foundation could prepare a few slides from surrounding States to show at the banquet at Club Congress next year. It was brought out that most agents have their own equipment and are getting better at taking slides. If the agents took their own slides this would be the beginning of a State set for teaching.

At the close of the discussions, Miss Warren summarized what seemed to be the main ideas brought out during the conference. She pointed out that she hoped that the Subcommittees to be appointed would be able to develop a satisfactory set of objectives at an early date and make other recommendations. It was the hope that these recommendations would result in a more effective and far-reaching program in helping 4-H girls and boys to appreciate the basic values of family living and the essentials of a home to make such possible. She stressed the fact that this project was very timely at this time because of the increased emphasis on housing. Miss Warren also expressed appreciation to all those present for their fine contributions to the thinking of the group.

Secretary Alice Linn



Enrollment and Completions --- 4-H Room Furnishing Project

	1948	1947	1946	1945	1944	1943	1942
No. boys enrolled	3,017	2,189	1,776	1,666	1,272	1,569	1,107
No. girls enrolled	161,079	169,730	156,727	150,623	143,897	145,209	150,155
Total enrollment	164,096	171,919	158,503	152,289	145,169	146,778	151,162
No. boys completing	2,016	1,518	1,170	1,021	973	1,230	848
No. girls completing	115,459	115,495	112,649	105,433	102,980	102,550	102,822
Total completions	117,475	117,013	113,819	106,454	103,953	103,780	103,670
No. rooms in project	245,327	108,657	100,713	105,899	89,178	104,882	96,816
No. articles made	399,093	419,730	371,625	355,054	324,033	298,116	328,572

Enrollments and Completions --- 4-H Room Furnishing Project (Continued)

	1941	1940	1939	1934	1929	1924
No. boys enrolled	1,645	2,729	1,613	1,781	304	320
No. girls enrolled	150,181	165,935	152,181	84,426	76,361	26,006
Total enrollment	151,826	168,664	153,794	86,207	76,665	26,326
No. boys completing	1,192	1,746	1,124	1,176	207	144
No. girls completing	103,188	112,407	102,896	54,761	40,792	10,375
Total completions	104,380	114,153	104,020	55,937	40,999	10,519
No. rooms in project	69,627	79,441	74,252	38,466	-	-
No. articles made	366,932	404,546	370,344	152,657	-	-

- Average -

	1934	1929	1924
	1 to	to	to
	1938	1933	1928
No. boys enrolled...	1,333	573	304
No. girls enrolled..	114,658	89,565	45,971
	115,991	90,138	46,275
No. boys completing.	848	416	180
No. girls completing	75,324	53,661	24,604
	76,162	54,077	24,784

Prepared by: Annual Reports Unit  
Division of Field Studies & Training  
ASO  
August 30, 1949



SUMMARY OF PARTICIPATION

1948 - Number of States Accepting the Contest	44*
1947 - Number of States Accepting the Contest	44**
1948 - Number of States Participating	44*
1947 - Number of States Participating	43**
1948 - Number of States Qualifying for State Award	42*
1947 - Number of States Qualifying for State Award	41**
1948 - Number of Counties Qualifying	1,129
1947 - Number of Counties Qualifying	1,059
1948 - Number of County Blue Award Winners	2,433
1947 - Number of County Blue Award Winners	1,990
1948 - Number of Members Enrolled in Home Improvement Project	135,233
1947 - Number of Members Enrolled in Home Improvement Project	151,051
1948 - Number of Members Completing Home Improvement Project	100,449
1947 - Number of Members Completing Home Improvement Project	106,625

\*In addition, Alaska, Hawaii and Puerto Rico accepted the 1948 program and participated. Only Puerto Rico qualified for the territorial award.

\*\*In addition, Alaska, Hawaii and Puerto Rico accepted the 1947 program. Only Hawaii participated and qualified for the territorial award.